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PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

—OF THE—

UNITED STATES."

A REVIEW AND EDITORIAL:

REPRINTED FROM OHIO MEDICAL RECORDER, OCTOBER, 1878.

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Reviews and Book Notices.

The Physicians and Surgeons of the United States; edited by WILLIAM B. ATKINSON, M. D., author of "Hints in the Obstetric Procedure," Permanent Secretary of the American Medical Association, also of the Medical Society of the State of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Charles Robson. 1878. Pp. 788. Price \$10.

If a man do not erect, in this age, his own tomb ere he dies, he shall live no longer in monument than the bell rings and the widow weeps. Therefore is it most expedient for the wise (if his conscience find no impediment to the contrary), to be the trumpet of his own virtues.—*Much Ado About Nothing*.

"Blow ye the trumpet, blow."

We cannot say that the book before us is valuable, though we have found it interesting, amusing, and, as showing the vanities, weaknesses and baser motives of men, instructive.

We have here the histories, more or less voluminous, of 2,661 doctors, most of whom are utterly unknown, outside of their own immediate circles. Each one of this vast majority feels, in his inmost soul, that he is simply a nobody, and so, fearful lest the world should feel so too, makes Sir Jack Falstaff his patron saint, and, like him, mouths and struts. Thus only can we account for the "incomprehensible lies" that we find.

Origin.—The book is Philadelphian. Its alpha and omega—its beginning and its end—Philadelphia. Gross begins it and Pancoast ends it, while lesser lights are scattered all through. Whenever the printer's devil called for "copy," and outside sources were temporarily exhausted, he received the autobiographies of a score of Philadelphia doctors, and was happy. We don't think a single doctor in that city has been overlooked: at least, after a two year's residence there, we can't think of one whose history is not here: at great length, if he wrote it himself, very brief if the editor wrote it for him. Every hanger-on at Jefferson, every quiz-master, assistant, demonstrator or interne, is here at full length, saying, à la Jack Horner, "what a great boy am I!"

Fame.—Glancing through the book, we find various claims for immortality.

About a dozen claim descent from "Mayflower" stock. (We admit the *descent*.) One does not use tea, coffee nor tobacco. Another has fourteen children. Another has had three wives, but no children. (He better use *Damiana*.) Another is the "oldest physician in the place." Another is a cousin of Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law. Another says his name *was* Smith, but he "*Latinized*" it into Faber. Another took his meals at the same boarding house with Lincoln. Another has an insane wife. Another's wife is grand-daughter to a signer of the

Declaration of Independence. Another says his wife is "widely known for her contributions, in poetry and prose, to the leading journals and periodicals of the country." Another has a wife who is a "grand-daughter of the author of the 'Star-Spangled Banner.'" Another, who occupies an entire column, generously devotes an even half of this space to his wife—who, indeed, really seems to be decidedly the better man. Another has invented a "cotton-chopper" and a bee-hive. Another has a grandfather and two uncles who are physicians, while his wife has a great-grandfather, grandfather, uncle, brother and cousin of the same profession, besides "two cousins (ladies) who married physicians." (That family history is most as bad as that of "the Jukes.") Another took a journey by ox-team from Missouri to Oregon: "a trip which consumed five months and seventeen days." (Nevertheless he is the father of eleven children.) Another hopes for fame because his father-in-law was once denounced by Bob Toombs for his anti-slavery principles. Another originated the phrase "sulphas Americani australis," as a synonym for quinia. And so on indefinitely, *usque ad nauseam*. Only one man in the entire book, so far as we have been able to find, has the manhood to acknowledge that his career "has not been especially marked by salient incidents."

Specialties:—The vast majority of these 2661 martyrs, make a specialty of surgery. Next to this we have obstetrics. (One young man of our acquaintance, who we will wager has not had a hundred labor cases, all told, nor used forceps once, gravely announces his specialty as obstetrics!) Then Diseases of women and children. After this, skin diseases, diseases of genito-urinary apparatus, nervous diseases, etc., etc. One makes a specialty of orthopedic surgery, yet speaks of amputating a *leg* near the *great trochanter*. Another makes a specialty of treating enlarged spleens. Another boasts of having, when only nineteen years old, successfully performed embryotomy unassisted, and of also having frequently performed "embryulica." (He probably means embryulcia, i. e. delivery by forceps.) But the one who takes the lead in this line, is a hair-splitting doctor in South Carolina who makes a distinction between a specialty in *practice* and one in *theory*;—in the former he has surgery, in the latter chemico-physiology. Less than half a dozen seem to acknowledge themselves as *only* "general practitioners."

Ancestry:—It may be considered an axiom, that when a man gets to boasting of his ancestors, he may be safely compared to the potato plant—the *best part is under the ground*. Well, we have here many men, in addition to the "Mayflower" chaps, who boast of their ancestry. One takes a half column to enumerate his. Another traces his back to the

last of the crusaders. Another dates his as far back as 843; prudently adding, however, elliptically, "so far as known." Although there is a good deal of competition in this line, the banner is carried off by a Philadelphian (of course), who not only traces himself back to a brother of a distinguished poet, but "is descended through his paternal grandmother from the 'Lords of the Isles' and the Thanes of Argyle and Kintyre, while through his mother he inherits the blood of the ancient barons of Crevequer and Cetham." As this blooded individual does not add a "so far as known," it must all be true; and we only admiringly exclaim, "How are the mighty"—petered out!

Ratios of space:—"The ocean deeps are mute, the shallows roar!" Gross and Flint—the one the greatest surgeon, the other the greatest physician, of the United States—have less than a page each. Bowditch, of Boston, has twenty lines. Thomas, of New York, twenty-eight lines. Seguin, of New York, four and one-half lines. Hodgen, of St. Louis, fourteen lines. Bodine, of Louisville, four lines. Lyman, of Boston, nine lines. Markoe, of New York, eighteen lines. W. W. Dawson, of Cincinnati, six lines (and scarcely a word correct at that). Toland of San Francisco,—the great surgeon of the Pacific slope—five lines, etc., etc. On the other hand:—Thompson, of Philadelphia,—an oculist of whom probably not a score of our readers have ever heard—has nearly two pages. A *dentist* named McQuillen, also of Philadelphia, has one page. DuBois, of New Haven, although he acknowledges to have made "no contributions to the science of medicine," yet occupies almost exactly two pages. While the *modest* editor of the book, Atkinson—who would probably be entirely unknown to our readers but for his official connection with the American Medical Association—requires as much space as Gross or Flint.

Truthfulness:—"A virtuous woman is beyond price"—simply owing to the scarcity of the article: Joseph achieved a world-wide reputation in connection with the Potiphar affair, simply on account of the fewness of Josephs: George Washington and his hatchet would not have been heard of, except for the rarity of strict truthfulness. Well, we don't think there are more G. W.'s in the medical profession than in the world at large, and although we have never heard of probably nine-tenths of the men whose names appear in this book, and cannot therefore assert that we *know* they lie any, we *can* say this;—that if those whom we don't know, do the same amount of lying, relatively, as do those whom we do know, they all, when they come to

* * * * * draw the accòmpts of evil,

Will find a deuced balance with the devil."

For instance:—There is a small Dispensary in Philadelphia, known as the “Charity Hospital Dispensary.” It is not a hospital, has not a single bed in it, is simply a dispensary, open from 12 to 1, and having an average daily attendance of perhaps thirty patients. The surgery of the institution consists principally in pulling teeth, occasionally opening an abscess, and very rarely in dressing a fracture of the upper extremity. Yet the young men who attend this dispensary, speak of themselves, in their autobiographies, as physicians, or surgeons, to “*Charity Hospital.*”

Again: the circulars which were scattered broad-cast over the country—the seed, of which this book is the harvest—requested the recipient (and who was not a recipient?) to mention, among other things, any notable cases he may have had.

“Lord, lord, how this world is given to lying!—In the state of innocency, Adam fell: and what should poor Jack Falstaff do, in these days of villainy?”

The temptation, being thus directly presented, to exaggerate, to “wrench the true cause the false way,” to *make* marvelous cases, to devise and carry out successfully wonderful operations, is it any wonder that, among these “notable cases,” those which the reader can regard as probable and true, are to those which he is compelled to regard as improbable and false, as the bread to the sack in Falstaff’s tavern-score: “one half-pennyworth of bread to an intolerable deal of sack!” The reader cannot but consider very much of it as “such a deal of skimble-skamble stuff as puts him from his faith.”

Finally, let us come nearer home. We have here a man who has been in and out among us for years; whose whole professional career we supposed his fellows were familiar with. Listen! He “continued his studies at St. Bartholomew’s and Guy’s hospitals, London.” We have not met a man who ever heard of his being in London, or in Europe, or who believes him to have been there. “During his medical career [he] performed nearly all the operations in military surgery, among them *several times* amputation at the hip-joint.” The Surgeon-General’s report gives a history of this operation as connected with the Service, but we look in vain for any account of these “several” operations. Finally, “He is professor of surgery in the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbus.” *There is not now, and never has been, any such college in existence.*

The Pictures.—“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity.”

We have here over fifty steel engravings. One would naturally suppose that these would be engravings of the men whose names are as familiar to the profession as household words; but such, with very few

exceptions, is not the case. Most of the engravings are of country bumpkins or city snobs. Some are of good men, but who have no claims as representative men, as the three Buffalo doctors. Quite a number are of men connected with provincial medical colleges: thus we have two from Cincinnati; one from Chicago; one from Columbus; one from Atlanta; one from New Orleans; two from Nashville; one from Richmond; one from Baltimore. Had the leading men in each of these towns been selected, there would not be so much cause for complaint; but such, with rare exceptions, is not the case.

Since these engravings are not inserted on account of the illustriousness of the men, what *is* the principle on which their selection is based? Not, certainly, on their good looks, for quite a number are decidedly inferior looking, while some are absolutely hideous. What *is* the principle? This question is answered by the *American Practitioner*, and as one of the editors of that journal occupies considerable space in this book, we cannot doubt that he knows whereof he affirms. In the October, 1877, number, the editor, in speaking of this book, said the pictures would cost "one hundred and twenty-five, or one hundred and seventy-five dollars, according to the kind of work." The case is now plain: the explanation meets all the indications. Each picture is simply the offspring of vanity and money, and we are no longer surprised at the predominance of country bumpkins, city snobs, and provincial "professors."

Our task is done. Our readers can judge for themselves of the value of the book. Were we to express our opinion, we would say the only value of the work consists in its enabling the reader to ascertain the ages of the men who are here autobiographed; only this, and nothing more.

Editorial.

A NATIONAL DISGRACE.

"Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live registered upon our *brazen* tombs;
Since, spite of cormorant devouring Time,
Th' endeavor of our present *wealth* may buy
That honor which shall bate his scythe's keen edge,
And make us heirs of all eternity."

—*Love's Labor Lost*

We publish elsewhere a review of the *Physicians and Surgeons of the United States*.

The book is made up of autobiographies; notwithstanding the fact that the sketches must necessarily be imperfect, since the subjects still live, and that, in the opinion of the world, very few men are capable of judging well of what they have themselves done, or even of truthfully detailing their own honors, while it has always been considered the very height of egotistic indelicacy for men to deck their own tombs with boastful inscriptions. This may be said of those really prominent men whose names appear here; while the rest,—the vast majority, the nobodies—have been fittingly compared by another to men trying to lift themselves by tugging at their own boot-straps, or to the frog in the fable who would emulate the ox.

That prominent men, leaders in the profession, are here biographed and autobiographed—men of whom we would have expected better things—is only too true. At first we were inclined to arraign them and demand an apology; but now, an explanation merely is probably all that can be asked for; for not only have these men suffered enough, been debased and humiliated enough, by the company in which they have found themselves, but, from information received from several of this class, we are inclined to believe that all, or nearly all, were led into this by fraud and misrepresentation—by a species of "confidence game." This is true not only of the histories, but also of the engravings. We cannot believe that such men as Gross, Flint, DaCosta, Pancoast, Parker, Post, Davis, and others—men whom we have been accustomed to venerate, to hold up for emulation, to consider as too lofty in their ambitions to feel the vanities and weaknesses of baser men—we cannot believe that these men had even the remotest idea of the true aim and character of this work when they allowed themselves to be thus entrapped. If they *did* know, then let the whole profession, at once, openly, formally, abandon all claim to knightly honor, bid farewell to

all aspiration for post-mortem fame, and, with one accord, struggle to rob posterity of its always pleasing task of memorizing and eulogizing the illustrious dead.

But what shall we say of the author of this disgrace? He says in his preface that he has published this book "to fill a want that has long been felt." That "want" existed in his pocket. The venality of Americans is notorious; but we had supposed the medical profession was quite free from it. Yet the author of this book—William B. Atkinson, of Philadelphia, unfortunately a physician, and, still more unfortunately, the Permanent Secretary of the American Medical Association—has disgraced himself and his profession, for a few paltry dollars. *Hired* by publishers—before unknown to the profession, this Judas—taking advantage of his official position, first to allay suspicion and then to advertise the book—*prostituted* that position and, *for money*, betrayed his fellows and has brought disgrace upon his noble profession. The book which this man Atkinson has been largely instrumental in issuing, is such a shame as should cause the cheek of every true man to crimson with blushes. Were it possible, the entire edition and copy-right should be bought up by the profession and destroyed; but, as this is impossible, it must remain—a monument of American venality, and of human weakness, pride and vanity. Alas! that the nineteenth century should witness, that Philadelphia should produce, that American physicians should tolerate—this humiliation of the medical profession of a nation.

We demand of William B. Atkinson, who has thus prostituted his secretaryship for pelf, and betrayed his profession; William B. Atkinson, who has disgraced us and dishonored us; William B. Atkinson, who has befouled the hitherto immaculate escutcheon of American physicians, and has made us the laughing-stock of the profession throughout the world—we demand of this man that he resign the position which he has disgraced, and bury himself deep in the ignominious grave of professional contempt.

If Dr. Atkinson has any explanation to make, excuse to give, or apology to offer, the columns of the RECORDER are open to him.